

REMARKS AND SPARKS

ICS Comments from Former Project Manager

As the former program manager for FIREScope (1975-82), I was pleased to see your editorial "Organizing for the Wildland Fire" in the September issue. It is rewarding to see testimonial that the work so many of us struggled with for almost a decade actually is paying off for the fire service.

Along with the pleasure, however, comes the realization that it could be better. Your editorial recognizes that the Incident Command System (ICS) and Multi-Agency Coordination System (MACS) worked well, but tends to leave the impression that these components constituted the FIREScope Program. Not so. There were major efforts to develop technical support systems (i.e. computer fire spread models, automated weather stations, common mapping, and infrared telemetry) that never reached operational status. The Reagan administration forced a cutoff of funding for these important features. Had they been developed, at a cost of about \$8 million, I am positive that we would have seen considerable additional savings during 1985, and into the future. It is also important to note that these technical support systems were intended for all risk applications, so their cumulative value would be far greater than simply wildland fire efficiency.

I was not pleased with David Cowardin's article "ICS, IEMS, and NIIMS..." The statement that "The U.S. Fire Administration and National Fire

Academy began developing what would become the National Interagency Incident Management System" is absolutely false. The old U.S. Forest Service and the National Wildfire Coordinating Group (all federal wildland agencies) developed NIIMS based upon my conceptual work and recommendations that I made to transfer FIREScope products on a national basis.

In fact, the Federal Emergency Management Agency actively resisted ICS and other components of FIREScope until they were forced to accept them by virtue of their operational success. We had several unsuccessful meetings with FEMA in attempts to coordinate efforts. Each was characterized by a "not invented here" attitude on FEMA's part.

Cowardin does correctly point out that IEMS is primarily a planning tool, and that jurisdictions may choose ICS as their incident management organization within the IEMS framework. It is my opinion that this results from FEMA finally being forced to recognize the value of ICS and MACS, and *not* from any brilliance or foresight on the part of FEMA's past managers. Cowardin's statement that "FIREScope was the parent to... IEMS" is only true because it was a shotgun wedding, forced upon FEMA by fire services who saw the value of an efficient multiagency response system.

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David Cowardin responds: I'm sorry you apparently took offense to the article. I felt it was written in such a way that credit was given where credit was due. Please note that "the use of USFS resources" was credited as prompting the move to make ICS a national management system.

I was not personally aware of the detailed infighting that took place between FEMA and ICS conceptual groups, although I knew some existed. I did feel that B.J. Thompson, with the National Fire Academy, and, later, the U.S. Fire Administration, gave support to ICS by sponsoring programs that dealt with the subject matter. The U.S. Fire Administration and NFA did support and work with individuals and fire service agencies in the development of NIIMS. Some people have, in fact, criticized both agencies for some of the ICS changes in NIIMS.

The intent of the September article was to provide a brief overview of the development and evolution of ICS, not to discredit any organization. Perhaps the words, "helping to develop" would have been more acceptable to you. However, as you point out, "the shotgun wedding was forced upon FEMA by the fire services," and the fire services were educated, as well as led, by the USFA and NFA.

I would appreciate hearing from you again with any detailed information you might have concerning ICS history and development, including insight about difficulties.